Horrid Journeying: Narratives of Enslavement and the Global African Diaspora

PIER M. LARSON
The Johns Hopkins University

Here I was a perfect stranger;
having left the Eyo country far behind.
—Samuel Crowther, 1837 [1]

Make human nature thy study, wherever thou residest—
whatever the religion, or the complexion, study their hearts.
—Ignatius Sancho, 1778 [2]

For more than three decades the slave narrative has interested scholars of North American history and literature.[3] Testimony of personal experience is among the most compelling evidence of lives in bondage, of the dance of power and dependency between master and slave, and of how bondage was shaped by the unique circumstances of time and place. Marion Wilson Starling has estimated that more than six thousand North Americans told stories of their captivity in slavery through interviews, essays, and books between the early eighteenth and

[1] Samuel Ajayi Crowther, "Narratives of Three Liberated Negroes," *Church Missionary Record* 8, no. 10 (October 1837): 219.

[2] Ignatius Sancho to Jack Wingrave, 1778, in Paul Edwards and Polly T. Rewt, eds., *The Letters of Ignatius Sancho* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p. 139.

[3] Note on terminology: Throughout this article I employ "enslavement" in its restricted meaning to refer to capture, natal alienation, and early adjustment to bondage—the making of a slave. I refer to time spent in bondage as "slavery," "captivity," "servitude," and the like.

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mid twentieth centuries. Narration of lives in bondage, write Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr. of the early narratives, "arose as a response to and refutation of claims that blacks could not write." The US slave narrative, they argue, "represents the attempts of blacks to write themselves into being." Narratives were carefully crafted, Gates notes, because "each author knew that all black slaves would be judged on this published evidence provided by one of their number." Narration of experience was a mutual project, "a communal utterance, a collective tale," and lay at the origin of the US African American literary tradition.[4]

The thousands of interviews conducted with American ex-slaves in seventeen US states between 1936 and 1938 by researchers affiliated with the Federal Writers' Project are also a rich mine of testimony to antebellum slave life and labor. Despite much critical reflection on the pitfalls of employing autobiographies of slavery orally elicited from elderly Americans as historical evidence, the testimonies of slaves and ex-slaves have now become an accepted, even necessary, evidentiary component of modern histories of slavery in North America. Few new monographs of North American slavery of any stripe—especially those focused on the nineteenth century, in which such evidence is richest—neglect to pay homage to the experiences of slaves as told by captives themselves. Many even make slave narratives a key part of their analysis, interweaving biographical and autobiographical accounts with economic, demographic, cultural, and other relevant evidence. In North American history, the slave narrative has won a significant place in both popular and academic studies of slavery, transforming how historians write about the "peculiar institution." But what about the slave narrative in African history?[5]

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[4] Marion Wilson Starling, *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), p. 311; Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, eds., *The Slave's Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. xi–xxxii; and Henry Louis Gates, ed., *The Classic Slave Narratives* (New York: Penguin, 1987), pp. ix–xviii.

[5] For interviews with ex-slaves, see George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography,* 19 vols. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972); George P. Rawick, Jan Hillegas, and Ken Lawrence, eds., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography. Supplement, Series 1,* 12 vols. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1977); and George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography. Supplement, Series 2,* 10 vols. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979). Ira Berlin and his coauthors discuss the history of slave narratives as memory and the politics and historical criticism surrounding them in Ira Berlin, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller, "Introduction: Slavery as Memory and History," in *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk about Their Personal Experiences of Slavery,* ed. Ira Berlin et al. (New York: New Press, 1998), pp. xiii–xx. See also John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves:

The Slave Narrative and the Global African Diaspora

Scholars of Africa have long studied slavery on the continent, yet when compared to their Americanist colleagues they have made sparing use of captives' life stories. Compendia of slave biographies edited by Philip D. Curtin in 1967 and Marcia Wright in 1984 and 1993 have achieved a wide circulation and readership within the profession. Both have been employed extensively in undergraduate classrooms, as has also the spectacular tale of Swema, whose narrative, first published in French, was brought to scholarly attention by Edward Alpers. E. Ann McDougall's biography of Fatma Barka; a new commented edition by Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy of the life of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua; Randy Sparks's recent book about the capture, bondage, and subsequent freeing of the Robin Johns of Old Calabar; the narratives included in a recent compendium on slavery in the Mediterranean lands of Islam; and Anne C. Bailey's inquiries into slavery in southeast Ghana all testify to a continuing concern for the slave narrative by scholars of Africa and its diasporas. In sharp contrast to scholarship on slavery in North America, however, research and writing on slavery within Africa has made scant use of the slave narrative as historical evidence. Africanists frequently employ African slave narratives for pedagogical purposes or separately publish compelling life histories when they encounter them in the course of their research (this accounts for all the works mentioned in the footnote to this paragraph except Bailey), but generally have been considerably more hesitant than their

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Approaches and Problems," *Journal of Southern History* 41 (1975): 473–492; Norman R. Yetman, "Ex-Slave Interviews and the Historiography of Slavery," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1984): 181–210; C. Van Woodward, "History from Slave Sources: A Review Article," *American Historical Review* 79 (1985): 470–481; and Donna J. Spindel, "Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 27, no. 2 (1996): 247–261. Such foundational works on slave life as those of John Blassingame and Eugene Genovese drew heavily on slave narratives. See John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); and Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974). The best recent examples of this tradition are Ira Berlin's general interpretations of North American slavery: Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Ira Berlin, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller, eds., *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Emancipation* (New York: New Press, 2000); and Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

Americanist colleagues to embrace narratives as fundamental data in major scholarly monographs on slavery.[6]

The reason for this lies in Africanists' ambivalence about the slave narrative as historical evidence and in the scantiness of known stories pertaining to lives of capture, movement, and servitude within Africa. In their concern for the validity of the narratives, scholars of Africa face many of the same nagging questions about the reliability of personal reminiscence as have Americanists in their use of similar data, but have generally come to different conclusions. And because Africanists have had only a small number of biographies at their disposal, few of them have made life stories a central part of their narratives of slavery. The unwillingness of Africans to discuss their enslavement has supplied another impediment. Some researchers have succeeded in interviewing ex-slaves about their times of servitude. But when former slaves have been consulted by researchers about personal experiences of bondage within Africa, they have more often tended to deny or hide their erstwhile servile status or to shift the conversation in other directions, making the study of slavery through personal reminiscence particularly troublesome and sending scholars to the archives instead. In most parts of Africa, family histories of slavery remain a powerful stain on honor with serious implications for social relationships and legal standing. Informants are more likely to claim histories of slave ownership than to admit servile origins, a pattern mostly contrary to that in the Americas.[7]

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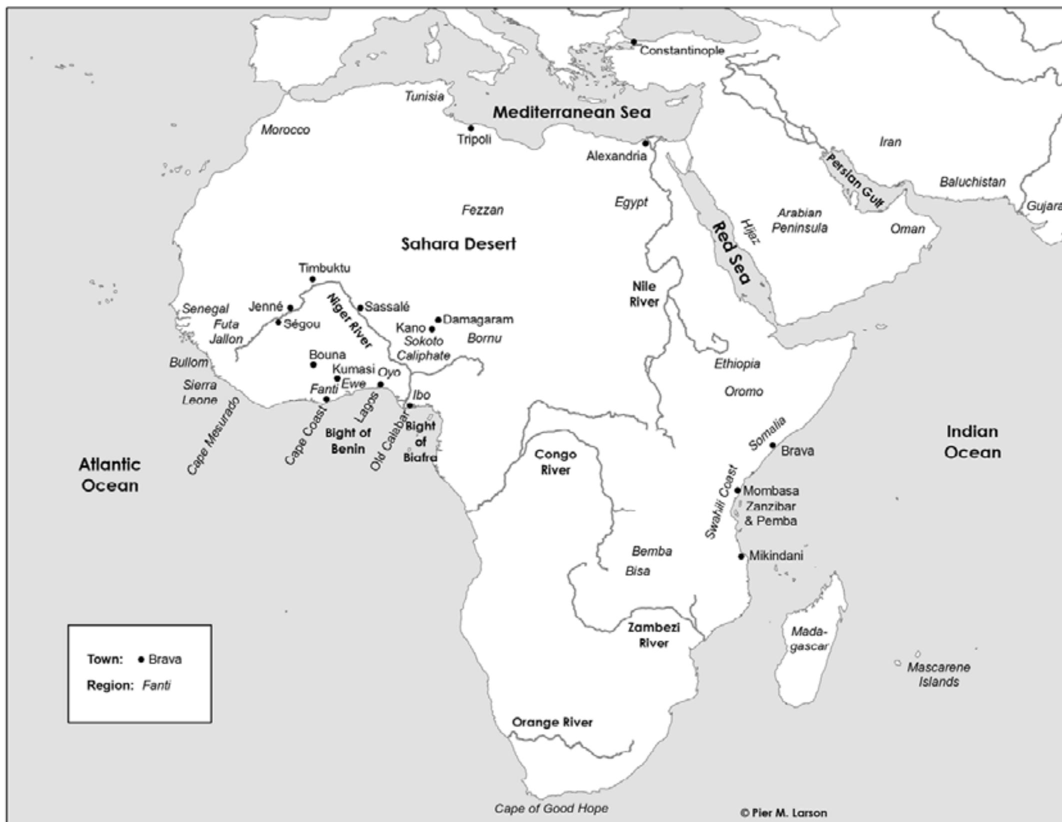
[6] Philip D. Curtin, ed., *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967); Edward A. Alpers, "The Story of Swema: Female Vulnerability in Nineteenth-Century East Africa," in *Women and Slavery in Africa,* ed. Claire Robertson and Martin A. Klein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), pp. 185–219; Marcia Wright, *Women in Peril: Life Stories of Four Captives* (Lusaka: NECZAM, 1984); Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa* (New York: Lilian Barber Press, 1993); E. Ann McDougall, "A Sense of Self: The Life of Fatma Barka," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 32, no. 2 (1998): 285–315; Robin Law and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America* (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener, 2001); John Hunwick and Eve Troutt Powell, eds., *The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands of Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener, 2002); Randy J. Sparks, *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Anne C. Bailey, *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Beyond the Silence and the Shame* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

[7] Frederick Cooper, "The Problem of Slavery in African Studies," *Journal of African History* 20, no. 1 (1979): 103–125; Martin A. Klein, "Studying the History of Those Who would Rather Forget," *History in Africa* 16 (1989): 209–217; Susan J. Rasmussen, "The Slave Narrative in Life History and Myth, and Problems of Ethnographic Representation of the Tuareg Cultural Predicament," *Ethnohistory* 46, no. 1 (1999): 67–108; Sandra E. Greene,



Map 1. Africa, showing places mentioned in the text. Map drawn by the author.

While ex-slaves and their descendants often have been reluctant to discuss personal *reminiscences* of bondage with researchers, many have supplied rich oral *traditions* of slaving and slavery received from foremothers and forefathers. In contrast to their wariness about reminiscences, scholars of Africa have readily incorporated these oral traditions into their work in refreshingly productive and innovative ways.

"Whispers and Silences: Explorations in African Oral History," *Africa Today* 50, no. 2 (2003): 41–53; and Bailey, *African Voices*, esp. pp. 67–68. Successful interviews include W. F. Baldock, "The Story of Rashid Bin Hassani of the Bisa Tribe, Northern Rhodesia," in *Ten Africans*, ed. Marjorie Perham (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1963), pp. 81–119; Mary Smith, *Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa* (New York: Praeger, 1964); Claire Robertson, "Post-Proclamation Slavery in Accra: A Female Affair?" in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, ed. Claire Robertson and Martin A. Klein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), pp. 230–245; and McDougall, "Sense of Self," pp. 285–315.

The most recent example of history from oral traditions about slavery is the fascinating history of the Chikunda, a class of military slaves and their descendants in greater Zambezia of southeast Africa, authored by Allen and Barbara Isaacman and based on more than two hundred interviews conducted over three decades along the Zambezi River.[8]

If reticent about imparting their personal experiences to outsiders who might set them to writing, enslaved and once-enslaved Africans certainly recounted their lives of capture and movement verbally to each other in the privacy of kin, accounting for the oral traditions mentioned in the previous paragraph. Mbotela, for example, related the details of his capture and servitude in East Africa to his son, James Juma Mbotela, through a series of conversations and storytelling sessions at the freed slave settlement of Freretown on the mainland opposite Mombasa Island (now Kenya). James Juma Mbotela suggests that a similar process of verbal transmission of lives in captivity from parents to children occurred throughout the settlement. Because most African slaveries came to a slow end over a number of decades between the late

[8] Among other examples are Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, ed., *Quand nos pères étaient captifs: Récits paysans du Niger* (Paris: Nubia, 1976); Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977); Margaret Strobel, *Muslim Women in Mombasa, 1890–1975* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979); Richard Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants and Slaves: The State and the Economy in the Middle Niger Valley, 1700–1914* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987); Wendy James, "Perceptions from an African Slaving Frontier," in *Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour*, ed. Léonie J. Archer (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 130–141; Patricia W. Romero, "Mama Khadija: A Life History as Example of Family History," in *Life Histories of African Women*, ed. Patricia W. Romero (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Ashfield Press, 1988), pp. 140–158; Janet J. Ewald, *Soldiers, Traders, and Slaves: State Formation and Economic Transformation in the Greater Nile Valley, 1700–1885* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Claire C. Robertson, *Sharing the Same Bowl: A Socioeconomic History of Women and Class in Accra, Ghana* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990); Andrew F. Clark, "The Challenges of Cross-Cultural Oral History: Collecting and Presenting Pulaar Traditions on Slavery from Bundu, Senegambia (West Africa)," *Oral History Review* 20, nos. 1–2 (1992): 1–21; Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1995); Martin A. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Robert M. Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890–1945* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001); Sean Stilwell, Ibrahim Hamza, and Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Oral History of Royal Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate: An Interview with Sallama Dako," *History in Africa* 28 (2001): 273–291; Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400–1900* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2003); and Allen F. Isaacman and Barbara Isaacman, *Slavery and Beyond: The Making of Men and Chikunda Ethnic Identities in the Unstable World of South-central Africa, 1750–1920* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2004).

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most of those who experienced servitude on the continent have now died, and the window of opportunity for scholars to interview once-enslaved persons—even if they were disposed to impart their own experiences—is now largely closed. With the death of each generation, the store of memory about capture has shallowed, a fact Allen and Barbara Isaacman documented over a career of interviewing about Chikunda slaves and ex-slaves in southeast Africa. Aware of this problem, some scholars have begun to compile slave biographies with the aim of bringing such accounts more easily and frequently into the writing of African history. Collection projects are still in progress, and as yet few broad conclusions have been drawn from them.[9]

Three challenges thus confront Africanists wanting to employ life stories to understand experiences of enslavement within Africa: relatively few such stories are available, ex-slaves are often reluctant to admit servile pasts, and most persons who were once enslaved have now died. An additional challenge presents itself in the curtailed memory of capture and transportation offered in many slave narratives. Broadening the national scope of the North American slave narrative, for example, Jerome Handler has recently published summary autobiographies of fifteen persons captured in Africa and transported to British America. "Biographical sketches," he writes, "some more detailed than others, can be drawn probably for scores, if not many more, of the African-born who were enslaved in Britain's Caribbean and North American colonies." Handler's collection consists exclusively of African-born slaves who entered the Atlantic and whose final destination was the British Americas. One general characteristic of these stories, Handler notes, is that they tend to focus on slaves' lives in the Americas, effacing former experiences of bondage within Africa. "Usually very little is said about the individual's life in Africa prior to being transported to the New World," he observes. This curious feature of the genre has also been recognized by other scholars and may stem from the perceived disinterest of potential North American readers, a failed memory of childhood, the mental blocking of traumatic events, or the shortening

[9] James Juma Mbotela, *The Freeing of the Slaves in East Africa* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1956); and Isaacman and Isaacman, *Slavery and Beyond,* p. 28. For one project of collection, see Paul E. Lovejoy, "Biography as Source Material: Towards a Biographical Archive of Enslaved Africans," in *Source Material for Studying the Slave Trade and the African Diaspora: Papers from a Conference of the Centre of Commonwealth Studies, University of Stirling, April 1996,* ed. Robin Law and Douglas Chambers (Stirling: University of Stirling, 1997), pp. 119–140.

and stereotyping of capture stories by creoles to impart moral lessons in the specific racial contexts of their production in North America.[10]

In the biography of "Uncle Jack," or the African Preacher, who was enslaved by kidnapping at the age of about seven in the mid eighteenth century, only one short paragraph is devoted to the act of capture and subsequent movement within Africa. The same is true of that of John Jea, who became a renowned preacher and evangelist after the war for US independence, and of Lahmen Kibby, a Sarakulle speaker from the Futa Jallon who languished forty years as a slave in South Carolina. Chloe Spear's brief narrative of capture suggests that European whites captured her in Africa, an unlikely possibility. Handler also notes that relatively few of the narratives by American slaves provide a detailed account of the oceanic "middle passage," and some say nothing about it at all. "None of the accounts," he concludes, "contradicts or throws into question current knowledge." Despite some exceptions, American slave narratives generally reveal little about capture in Africa or slaves' experiences there. They are focused on the circumstances of life in the Americas.[11]

This patterned, social amnesia in many slave narratives presents a significant challenge to writing histories of capture within Africa, probably the least known dimension of the African slave trades. How did Africans actually experience and recount their traumas of enslavement, and what implications do those stories have for defining and conceptualizing the global African diaspora? Poorly known and studied, capture was originary to every branch of the global African diaspora and to the making of slaves for both internal and external slave trades. According to published estimates, roughly the same number of sub-Saharan Africans—some eleven to twelve million—were coercively moved across

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[10] Jerome S. Handler, "Survivors of the Middle Passage: Life Histories of Enslaved Africans in British America," *Slavery and Abolition* 23, no. 1 (2002): 25–56 (quotation from p. 25). On the last point raised in this paragraph, Michael Gomez writes about how US African Americans developed stories of capture in Africa as white trickery by use of such seductive ruses as red cloth, making reasoned statements about the moral culpability of whites in the transatlantic slave trade. Michael Angelo Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 199–214.

[11] William Spotswood White, *The African Preacher: An Authentic Narrative* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1849), p. 6; John Jea, *The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher, Compiled and Written by Himself* (Portsea, 1811), p. 3; T. Dwight, "Condition and Character of Negroes in Africa," *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 46 (1864): 80–85; A Lady of Boston, *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear, a Native of Africa, who was Enslaved in Childhood, and Died in Boston, January 3, 1815, Aged 65 Years* (Boston: J. Loring, 1832), pp. 9–11; and Handler, "Survivors of the Middle Passage," pp. 30, 42.

the Sahara and into the Indian Ocean and were sent as captives into the Atlantic between about 650 and 1900. But many captives never departed sub-Saharan Africa, as historians of Africa have long demonstrated. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the volume of sub-Saharan Africa's external slave trades reached their apogee, as many or more slaves were newly captured and retained within the continent as were sent beyond sub-Saharan Africa into external exile. The combined volume of sub-Saharan Africa's several external slave trades, estimated at over twenty million between 650 and 1900, also serves as a rough order of magnitude for the number of new slaves captured and retained within sub-Saharan Africa.[12]

"A large number of slaves, probably a majority, were kept within Africa even during the peak years of the Atlantic trade," Martin Klein has written in his history of slavery in West Africa. For sub-Saharan Africa's trade across the Sahara, Ralph Austen, its foremost estimator, has noted that "it is harder to count slaves settled in the areas of

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[12] Pier M. Larson, "African Diasporas and the Atlantic," in *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500–2000,* ed. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Eric R. Seeman (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2007), pp. 134, 140–143. The published estimates for sub-Saharan Africa's external slave trades summarized in this source, which total 22.9 million for the period 650–1900, have long been reported by scholars of African slavery and are summarized from secondary literature. For the linkage between slavery within sub-Saharan Africa and that region's external slave trades into the Atlantic, see Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), pp. 140–169, 379–342 (esp. 140–141, 153); Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 38–59; Herbert S. Klein, "The Slave Trade in the Western Sudan during the Nineteenth Century," in *The Human Commodity,* ed. Elisabeth Savage (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp. 39–41; James F. Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 44–58 (esp. p. 53); Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule,* pp. 1, 39–41; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 62–67, 113, 159. For the linking of African slavery and the Indian Ocean slave trade, see Ralph A. Austen, "The 19th Century Islamic Slave Trade from East Africa (Swahili and Red Sea Coasts): A Tentative Census," in *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century,* ed. William Gervase Clarence-Smith (London: Frank Cass, 1989), pp. 21–44; William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "The Economics of the Indian Ocean and Red Sea Slave Trades in the 19th Century: An Overview," in Clarence-Smith, *Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade,* p. 3; Manning, *Slavery and African Life,* pp. 38–59, 47; and Lovejoy, *Transformations,* pp. 158–159. And for the trans-Saharan trade's links to sub-Saharan African slavery, see Ralph A. Austen, "The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: A Tentative Census," in *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade,* ed. Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn (New York: Academic Press, 1979), pp. 23–76; Manning, *Slavery and African Life,* pp. 38–59; Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule,* pp. 56, 65; and Lovejoy, *Transformations,* pp. 62–67, 159. See also Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 126, 129, 165.

transit, although these probably exceeded (as they did on the Indian Ocean coast) the number who traveled farther." In his study of the demography of enslavement, Patrick Manning found that "The slave population in Africa was roughly equal in size to the New World slave population from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries. . . . After about 1850, there were more slaves in Africa than in the New World." Herbert Klein has written that the number of slaves held in Africa during the early eighteenth century was on the order of three to five million. The domestic impact of the ending of the transatlantic slave trade was so great that "by 1850 there were more slaves in Africa than there were in America—probably now numbering close to 10 million."[13]

These may be understatements. Lovejoy, for example, has estimated the slave population of the western and central Sudan in about 1900 at between three and four million, not counting slaves held in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa such as in the Sokoto caliphate of northern Nigeria, once among the largest slaveholding states in the world, where some two million were bound in captivity in about 1890. On the East African islands of Zanzibar and Pemba alone, more than 100,000 persons were claimed as slaves in the late nineteenth century, nearly half as many as in all of mainland North America in 1750 or similar to the number in the single US state of Arkansas—fifty-four times their combined size—in 1860. Even in the early nineteenth century, probably more African slaves were held in sub-Saharan Africa than in the rest of the world. Africa south of the Sahara was a source of slaves *and* constituted a major destination for new captives.[14]

And, judging by their stories, African captives who found themselves aboard ships or trudging northward across Saharan sands were seldom originally enslaved for immediate exile beyond sub-Saharan

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[13] Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, pp. 39–41; Ralph A. Austen, "Slave Trade: The Sahara Desert and Red Sea Region," in *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara*, ed. John Middleton (New York: Scribners, 1997), pp. iv, 103; Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, p. 23; and Klein, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, p. 129. The last figure is also supported in Patrick Manning, *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa, 1880–1995*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 26.

[14] Paul E. Lovejoy and Jan S. Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 1–2; Paul E. Lovejoy, "Islam, Slavery, and Political Transformation in West Africa: Constraints on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade," *Outre-Mers: Revue d'Histoire* 89, nos. 336–337 (2002): 263; Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, p. 69; Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 74; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p. 242, table 3; and Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, p. 370, table 1.

Africa. In the complex and reticulated connections between capture, the slave trades, and slavery, many served for weeks, months, years, and even a decade in Africa before they entered into one of the external commercial systems, often by a turn of ill fate. Broteer, for example, enslaved in 1737 at the age of about six and embarked from the West African coast two years later, spent considerable time in African servitude before his sale to Europeans. Ali Eisami Gazirambe was captured in Bornu in about 1810 and suffered eight years as a bondman in Kano and Katsina before abruptly heading to the coast, from which he departed for a transatlantic passage in 1818. Salih Bilali was enslaved when he was about twelve years old and served in Ségou for eighteen years before he was inducted into the transatlantic system. Kaweli, who served as interpreter in New Haven, Connecticut, for the famous *Amistad* captives, was kidnapped near the windward coast in about 1829 when less than ten years old and sold to Bayimi, the king of the Bullom country. For three years he labored as a rice farmer in the servile entourage of one of the king's wives, at Mani, where he reports he was treated "with great kindness." The "great kindness" was short lived. One day he was ceded to a Portuguese merchant near the town, who passed him and some three hundred others in similar state to a Portuguese slaving vessel. After his capture in what is now eastern Zambia in the 1870s at about age ten, Chilekwa was a slave to two different masters, serving each for about a year before his then owner, Nakaona, said to him, "Chilekwa, let us go to the coast to buy calico and salt." When they arrived at Mikindani on the Swahili coast of East Africa, Chilekwa was soon bound into the hold of a dhow steering for the Persian Gulf. Rashid bin Hassani was sold several times and tarried for years in the East African interior before he reached the shores of the Indian Ocean. Crossers of the Sahara such as Mohammed Ali ben Said, Josephine Bakhita, and Djalo also reported experiences of multiple exchange from speculator to speculator before they reached their respective destinations in the Mediterranean World.[15]

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[15] Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa, but Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America, Related by Himself* (New-London, Conn.: Printed by C. Holt at the Bee-Office, 1798); Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle, "A Biographical Sketch of Ali Eisami Gazir," in *African Native Literature, or Proverbs, Tales, Fables, & Historical Fragments in the Kanuri or Bornu Language, to which Are Added a Translation of the Above and a Kanuri-English Vocabulary*, ed. Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle (London: Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square, 1854), pp. 248–256; William B. Hodgson, *Notes on Northern Africa, the Sahara, and Soudan* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1844), pp. 68–74; John Warner Barber, *A History of the* Amistad *Captives: Being a Circumstantial Account of the Capture of the Spanish Schooner* Amistad, *by the Africans on Board; Their Voyage, and Capture Also,*

Although the African portion of lives of enslavement is often adumbrated or left silent in slave narratives produced for audiences outside of the continent, the overwhelming majority of captives crossing the Atlantic or heading for other external destinations were not new to their bondage when departing sub-Saharan Africa. Specific locations in sub-Saharan Africa were original lands of captivity for nearly all who later forcibly departed from the continent. African experiences of enslavement, which lie at the origin of every new capture within Africa whatever the subsequent destination of the prisoner, have much to teach us about African slavery and survivors' experiences and interpretations of it. Most pertinently for this article, they suggest the importance of recentering the global African diaspora *onto the African continent* and creating theories of diaspora that are Africa-centric and based on captives' subjective experiences. Numerically speaking and in the multiplicity of its forms of slavery and servile communities, Africa constituted a more significant and diverse part of the African diaspora than did the Americas, or probably all external destinations combined.

Powerfully testified in the narrated lives of Africans who became victims of capture, this point has been lost on most scholars of the African diaspora, who tend to interpret that diaspora as lying only *beyond* continental Africa. Popular ways of "seeing" the African diaspora tend to eliminate captive Africans within sub-Saharan Africa and to extrapolate the forms and dimensions of diasporan communities and consciousness largely from the experiences of Africans and their descendants in the Americas. This article is a criticism of the way in which the global African diaspora has been restrictively defined by taking creole, African American consciousness as its starting point rather than interpreting that consciousness as one of the diaspora's

near Long Island, New York; With Biographical Sketches of Each of the Surviving Africans; an Account of the Trials had on Their Case, Before the District and Circuit Courts of the United States, for the District of Connecticut (New Haven, Conn.: E. L. & J. W. Barber, 1840), p. 15; Petro Kilekwa, *Slave Boy to Priest: The Autobiography of Padre Petro Kilekwa* (London: Universities' Mission to Central Africa, 1937); Baldock, "Story of Rashid Bin Hassani"; Lorenz Tutschek, "Ethnologische Skizzen aus Tumale in Centralafrika," *Das Ausland* 263 (1847): 1049; Lorenz Tutschek, "Ethnologische Skizzen aus Tumale in Centralafrika," *Das Ausland* 79 (1848): 314; "A Native of Bornoo," *Atlantic Monthly* (October 1867): 485–495; Nicholas Said, *The Autobiography of Nicholas Said, A Native of Bornou, Eastern Soudan, Central Africa* (Memphis, Tenn.: Shotwell and Co., 1873); Maria Luisa Dagnino, *Bakhita Tells Her Story*, 3rd ed. (Rome: Casa Generalizia, Canossiane Figlie della Carità, 1993), pp. 37–68; and Allan Austin, "Mohammed Ali Ben Said: Travels on Five Continents," *Contributions in Black Studies* 12 (1994): 129–158.

many end points. A recent history of the African diaspora published by Cambridge University Press for use in the classroom, for example, acknowledges that a majority of Africans departed the continent into regions other than the Atlantic but devotes only one chapter of eight to them. The work, which focuses primarily on the Americas, makes virtually no mention of the enslaved who remained within Africa. The way most scholars continue to define the African diaspora—against the grain of accepted research on sub-Saharan Africa's slave trades and systems of slavery—effaces millions of captives from the diaspora and obscures both its immensity and its global diversity.[16]

This interpretive essay investigates the characteristics and meanings of capture and forced migration in the African portion of slave narratives to reveal how captives viewed themselves as strangers in the African societies of their bondage. These qualitative, personal experiences related by enslaved persons vigorously challenge the notion that the African diaspora existed only beyond sub-Saharan Africa. The findings explored here are based on a preliminary reading of some four dozen narratives collected from a range of sources and form part of a larger project about the African diaspora within Africa. Some of the personal histories considered here involved individuals who later departed sub-Saharan Africa for external destinations. But others are drawn from individuals who remained within sub-Saharan Africa as enslaved persons throughout their lives, probably representing the majority of new captives. Many such testimonies of capture remain to be discovered, and they are scattered very broadly in historical archives and libraries around the world. The challenge for scholars is locating new narratives and making them accessible, for they are encoded in a large assortment of African, European, and other languages (including Arabic, Turkish, and Persian), and in multiple formats and genres. Although a larger database will allow for more comprehensive conclusions on a variety of themes, my interest here is specifically in observing consciousness about alienation and home offered in available narratives of capture. What do these stories tell us about the human experiences that lie at

[16] Michael Angelo Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 35. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza has recently criticized the Atlanto-centric focus of African diaspora studies but only mentions what he terms "intra-African diasporas" in passing, and mostly in reference to merchant and military movements on the continent, not with respect to slaves, who where far greater in numbers. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic," *African Affairs* 104, no. 414 (January 2005): esp. p. 45. I discuss this point at greater length in Larson, "African Diasporas and the Atlantic," pp. 140–143.

the heart of the global African diaspora? How do they, together with scholarship about sub-Saharan Africa's slave trades and slave systems, challenge scholars' common definition of that diaspora?

Alienation and Home

African slave narratives, or "narratives of enslavement" as I will henceforth call them to distinguish them from the well-known American slave narrative, consist of histories of capture, movement, and servitude within sub-Saharan Africa, whatever the subsequent destination of the captive. Because enslavement entailed what Orlando Patterson calls "natal alienation," narratives of enslavement are all histories of capture and subsequent estrangement from kin and homeland. They recount what one victim of the trans-Sahara slave trade, Mohammed Ali ben Said, once vividly described as "this horrid journeying," coerced land voyages in Africa sometimes followed by further involuntary exile into the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, or the Atlantic.[17]

Let us begin in the Fanti country, not far from the Atlantic coast of modern Ghana. The year is 1770. In a woods not far from town, but distant enough to afford some privacy and relief from adults, about twenty boys and girls are playing. They are in their early teens. Among them is Ottobah, age twelve, who has been visiting his uncle here for some three months. The youth are collecting fruit, catching birds, and enjoying themselves. The frequency of Ottobah and his friends' visits to the woods while adults attend to their daily business is generally known in the environs. The circulation of this mundane knowledge, however, on this day proves crucial to the course of Ottobah's life. "We went into the woods as usual," he recounted some seventeen years later at the age of thirty, "but we had not been [there] above two hours before our troubles began, when several great ruffians came upon us suddenly, and said we had committed a fault against their lord, and we must go and answer for it ourselves before him. Some of us attempted in vain to run away," Ottobah remembered, "but pistols and cutlasses were soon introduced, threatening, that if we offered to stir we should all lie dead on the spot."

In a flurry of surprise and threats of deadly violence, the kidnapping and capture of Ottobah Cugoano commenced with the sicken-

[17] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 5–10; and Said, *Autobiography of Nicholas Said*, p. 53.

ing dismay it did for millions of others in Africa's era of enslavement. Although weapons prevented the children's initial escape into those hushed woods of the Fanti interior, the seduction of lies nourished their hope of return to village and kin. One of their captors, seeming more friendly than the rest, led them off, claiming he would favorably represent their case of unspecified transgression to his "lord." "We were soon led out of the way which we knew," wrote Cugoano. But the children never met that lord, for most of them landed within a week or two in the slave pens of Cape Coast and its castle, a stone's throw from the waves of the Atlantic slapping on nearby beaches. Separated from the rest, Cugoano remembers his days of capture in Africa as ones of anxiety, confusion, and deception. Emotions mark his journey. His feelings lend meaning to his physical movement. His separation from companions, Cugoano writes, "gave me strong suspicion that there was some treachery in the case, and I began to think that my hopes of returning home again were all over. I soon became very uneasy," he continued, "not knowing what to do, and refused to eat or drink for whole days together, till the man of the house told me that he would do all in his power to get me back to my uncle."

After six days in that man's house, Cugoano was led off on a voyage, he was told, to the town of his father. Cugoano's captor had obtained detailed knowledge of the boy's kinship, and he knew of the preteen's fervent desire to return to his father (Cugoano had been living with his uncle for some time prior to his capture). Sometimes intimates of their captives, slavers often used personal information to ensnare youthful victims. Deploying the lie of a return to kin to keep Cugoano walking, the captor led the boy in another direction. Cugoano, of course, never recognized the route upon which he was led, for that road terminated at the Atlantic coast and the doorsteps of a trading castle. When he arrived before the imposing fortress, noted Cugoano, "I asked my guide what I was brought there for, he told me to learn the ways of the *browfow,* that is the white faced people." Those were poignant words, for learn the ways of the whites Cugoano did. "I saw him take a gun, a piece of cloth, and some lead for me," Cugoano writes of his sale, "and then he told me that he must now leave me there, and went off." Within three days, twelve-year-old Cugoano was in the hold of a European slave ship.[18]

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[18] Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great-Britain by Ottobah Cugoano, a Native of Africa* (London, 1787), pp. 5–10; and Roxann Wheeler, "'Betrayed by Some of My Own Complexion': Cugoano, Abolition, and the Contemporary

Cugoano's swift journey from enslavement to shipboard is atypical of most African captives who departed sub-Saharan Africa. But it is illustrative in another way: in nearly all accounts of enslavement, Africans describe their movement away from points of origin—from home—as Cugoano did, in varying idioms of violence and displacement. These included expressions of broken kinship, distance traveled, exchanges from one owner to the next, new dialects and languages spoken, political and cultural borders crossed, confusing unfamiliarity of surroundings, and fading degrees of hope. Through their dramatic and varying languages of travel and alienation, captives remembered their horrid journeying as both painful and meaningful. By vividly and richly describing estrangement, they simultaneously imagined their specific continental homes and confirmed their sense of precaptive placement. Persons who suffered the misfortunes of enslavement began to fashion a diasporan consciousness and idealized images of a specific African home from the moment of their capture.

Historians of the Atlantic dispersion of Africans have long argued that displacement is a necessary but insufficient condition for the rise of distinctly diasporan identities. A dispersion is not necessarily a diaspora. Many Africans in dispersion either imagined or yearned for an African home or maintained some connection with it. Others sought to return. More still (mostly outside the Americas) remembered home but achieved some integration into the society of their enslavement through the formation of new kinship and ritual ties and claims upon social and political institutions. Fatma Barka is a case in point. Purchased as a slave in or about Timbuktu during the first decade of the twentieth century by one Mohamed Barka, a wealthy merchant from southern Morocco, she remembered and emphasized her slave origins in sub-Saharan Africa and her servile status many decades later when interviewed in Morocco in 1994, the year before her death. A vivid memory of a northward crossing of the Sahara Desert with her master not long after her purchase remained a key point of reference for her identity in old age.

Because slaves like Fatma Barka sought social and religious integration into their masters' societies, many scholars have argued that

Language of Racialism," in *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic,* ed. Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), pp. 17–38. Like Cugoano, Tallen of Kissee also claimed only four weeks between capture and entry aboard a European slave ship: Mary L. Cox and Susan H. Cox, eds., *Narrative of Dimmock Charlton, a British Subject, Taken from the Brig "Peacock" by the U.S. Sloop "Hornet," Enslaved while a Prisoner of War, and Retained Forty-five Years in Bondage* (Philadelphia, 1859), p. 4.

they did not develop a diasporan consciousness or had lost a sense of sub-Saharan African home. Therefore, they were no longer a part of the African diaspora. But as Barka's biographer points out, in Morocco Fatma participated in a "slave culture" prevalent in many Islamic regions: "a conscious desire by slaves to adopt both Arabic as the language of rituals and Islam. . . . In so doing they were not only defining their own terms of unity, but reducing their marginality vis-à-vis the fully Muslim . . . society into which they were integrating." Successful struggles for integration, then, whether or not in Islamic societies, did not mean the end of a particular consciousness of home; they were actually the result of an acute and lasting sense of foreign, servile origin. Where a consciousness of home faded with the generations, such as in some African, Middle Eastern, and Indian Ocean societies, newly arriving captives reproduced homeland-identifying groups at least until the end of the slave trade. The very high rates of manumission in Islamic and many non-Islamic African societies, for example, usually created a ferocious demand for new captives to replace those continuously emancipated by their masters. Consciousness of a specific sub-Sahara African home as evinced in narratives of enslavement might lead captives to different kinds of cultural and community-building strategies.[19]

Most important, stories of horrid journeying reveal how enslaved Africans assembled their consciousness of home, how they interpreted their dislocation and responded to the misfortunes and opportunities of enslavement. Narratives of enslavement created meanings for human experiences of trauma, transfer, and readjustment, as did slave narratives in the Americas. It is these meanings read by slaves into their lives—their evolving understandings of home, displacement, and estrangement—that constitute a significant dimension of African diasporan consciousness within sub-Saharan Africa, as they did elsewhere. If an imagination of home and "the creation of a diasporan consciousness" is central to the inclusion of physically displaced persons and communities within the African diaspora, as Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley have argued, displaced Africans living in exile within sub-Saharan Africa and those in societies with possibilities for incorporation outside of it were also members of the African diaspora.[20]

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[19] McDougall, "Sense of Self," esp. p. 300.

[20] While not in agreement on the details, most scholars working in the Atlantic sector of the African diaspora have reached a rough consensus on this point. See William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83–99; James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. pp. 249–265; Tiffany Ruby Patterson

The structure of African narratives of enslavement often reveals their authors' sense of original placement and subsequent uprooting. When Abū Bakr al-Siddiq was enslaved in Bouna, now northern Côte d'Ivoire, in 1804, he was roughly the same age as Cugoano had been when captured in Fantiland. When some thirty-two years later in Jamaican bondage Abū Bakr composed an Arabic-language narrative of his experience, he precisely located his African home. Listen to him.

> My name is Abū Bakr al-Siddiq, my birthplace is Timbuktu. I was educated in the town of Jenne, and fully instructed in reading and construing the Koran—[and] in the interpretation of it with the help of commentaries. This was done in the city of Bouna, where there are many learned men, who are not natives of one place. . . . My father's name was Kara Mūsa the Sharif Watarawi, *Tafsir.* His brothers were named Idris, 'Abd ar-Rahman, Mahmud, and Abu Bakr. Their father, my grandfather, was Mar, al-qaid, 'Umar ibn Shahid al-Malik; he lived in the cities of Timbuktu and Jenne. He was also called ibn Abu Ibrahim.

Usually recorded after mature reflection on experience, narratives of enslavement, like that of Abū Bakr al-Siddiq, frequently commence with explicit statements of original placement, of home. Geography alone seldom located home, for the Africans who wrote narratives of capture situated themselves within webs of kinship, of which enslavement deprived them.[21]

Recitation of the names of hometown and close kin at the opening of narratives is a common feature. The effort to communicate the importance of African kin networks and natal placement to skeptical or hostile audiences may partially account for the inordinately high number of claims to royal origin in Atlantic slave narratives. "I was born in the city of Agimaque, on the coast of Fantyn," wrote Cugoano, for example. "[M]y father was a companion to the chief in that part of the country of Fantee, and when the king died I was left in his house with his family; soon after I was sent for by his nephew, Ambro Accasa, who succeeded the old king in the chiefdom of that part of the Fantee

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and Robin D. G. Kelly, "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World," *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (2000): 13–15 (quotation from p. 14); and Kim D. Butler, "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse," *Diaspora* 10, no. 2 (2001): 189–219.

[21] Ivor Wilks, "Abū Bakr Al-Siddiq of Timbuktu," in *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade,* ed. Philip D. Curtin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), pp. 157–158.

known by the name of Agimaque and Assinee. I lived with his children, enjoying peace and tranquility, about twenty moons, which, according to their way of reckoning time, is two years. I was sent for to visit an uncle, who lived at a considerable distance from Agimaque." Defying in narrative the capture that robbed him of family, Cugoano wove a thick web of royal affinity and kinship into his story of capture.[22]

"My heart was seized by the heartbreaking pain of exile," said Alfred Diban of his capture in what is now northern Burkina Faso and of his coerced movement several hundred miles northward to serve a master near Timbuktu. When years later he retold his story, he commenced it in the following terms: "I was born in Da (near Tougan) in about 1875. My father's name was Founi and my mother's Bonlènè. She came from Tosson, a neighboring village to Da. My paternal grandfather was called Zenwoni." Taken prisoner when Bemba warriors swooped down on her village in what is now eastern Zambia and in which all the men were immediately executed and the women led off to become captive wives, Chisi-Ndjurisiye-Sichayunga was so young she could scarcely walk. "My home was in the Biza [Bisa] country: for we are Chawa," she commenced in her narrative penned many decades later. "I do not know my family, for enemies carried me off when I was still a child. The name of my Father was Sichayunga, and the name of my mother was Ntundu." "When I left home," wrote Akafede of his capture in the Oromo lands of Ethiopia, "I thought: God has let me go out from the hands of my mother and my father to do me ill." Even when they scarcely remembered the names of kin, those who had been enslaved sought to imagine and reconstruct their family relationships when telling life stories many years later. If we take the written texts of former slaves as the end product of accretions of the human imagination fashioned into stories of enslavement over the course of time following capture, they provide examples of the construction of diasporan consciousness in the remembrance of connections to kin and homeland from the moment of deracination.[23]

A significant dimension of Cugoano's narrative is reflected in numerous stories of enslavement: his captors' floating of deliberately misleading information served to maintain some hope of return and

[22] Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, p. 6.

[23] Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *Alfred Diban: Premier chrétien de Haute-Volta* (Paris: Éditions du CERF, 1983), pp. 22, 29; Elise Kootz-Kretschmer, *Stories of Old Times*, trans. M. Bryan (London: Sheldon Press, 1932), p. 5; Akafede to another Oromo captive, Munich, 21 October 1840, in P. E. H. Hair, "The Brothers Tutschek and Their Sudanese Informants," *Sudan Notes and Records* 50 (1969): 61.

repatriation in the youthful captive, eliciting anxious compliance from him until the finality of his enslavement became apparent as he stood in front of the imposing castle at Cape Coast. Many slavers exploited youthful naïveté and the desire to return home to forestall resistance and inspire hope while they marched the hapless children away from kin and homeland or exchanged them to the next dealer. While these experiences were no doubt real, they also function in the stories as moral observations on the treachery and illegitimacy of childhood enslavement. The morning after his capture in what is now southwestern Nigeria along with his mother, infant brother, and sister, Bishop Crowther writes:

> we were brought to the Chief of our captors—for there were many other Chiefs,—as trophies at his feet. In a little while, a separation took place; when my sister and I fell to the share of the Chief, and my mother and the infant to the victors. We dared not vent our grief in loud cries, but by very heavy sobs. My mother, with the infant, was led away, *comforted with the promise that she should see us again, when we should leave Iseh'i for Dahdah, the town of the Chief.* In a few hours after, it was soon agreed upon that I should be bartered for a horse in Iseh'i, that very day. Thus was I separated from my mother and sister for the first time in my life; and the latter not to be seen more in this world.

The specious promise offered to Crowther and his mother as they were parted that they would soon meet again turned out to be a subterfuge; the reality of the deception sank in when Crowther was exchanged for a horse.[24]

Or take the case of Aneaso of Iboland in the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra. He was enslaved in about 1809 at the age of ten when a suitor to one of his sisters requested his company on a trip to a regional market. The two walked all day to their destination and then remained several days at the town, near the ocean. There, young Aneaso was sold to Europeans and crossed with some seven hundred others in the stinking hold of a slaving ship to Kingston, Jamaica. Chisi-Ndjurisiye-Sichayunga reports the first time she was sold after three years of residence in the compound of a Bemba chief: "Then four coast people, an Arab and three black men, came to luBemba. After the chief had spoken with them in *secret* he brought them to the hut where I was, and said, 'Chisi, these men are my relations. You are to go home with them and stay with them. You shall return with me after a time when I go to

[24] Crowther, "Narratives of Three Liberated Negroes," p. 219, emphasis added.

visit them.' Then he gave me meat and fish, saying, 'Eat this while you are with my relations.'" The chief's "relations" were slave traders from Africa's east coast. Once she departed with them, Chisi never saw the mendacious chief again.[25]

Seized by an enemy warrior at the age of ten when his town fell prey to a long siege by the armies of Oyo, Joseph Wright was soon sold by the soldier-captor and his wife to a merchant lingering about the war camp. "My mistress [the wife] told me to go with the man [the merchant] and fetch some rum," noted Wright a decade later when he penned his story in broken English. "Just I go out of her sight, the man strip me of my clothes and sent it to my mistress. Then I know that they only deceive me by saying go with the man and fetch some rum." Ten-year-old Wright had experienced the verbal fraud and personal betrayal typical to such exchanges in children. The transaction between mistress and merchant did not include the clothes Wright was wearing, and the lie of sending the boy on an errand was soon stripped as bare as was Wright when his clothing was despatched back to the woman who had just sold him. The dealer who bought Wright flipped him within the week in a nearby slave market, turning a speedy profit on his short-term investment.[26]

Olaudah Equiano's story is one of the most detailed and rich in its interpretation of movement from home. Equiano wrote that he was kidnapped as a boy of some eleven years in about 1756 in the interior of what is now Iboland. The first chapter of Equiano's autobiography, originally published in 1789, some thirty-three years later, is devoted to a detailed account of his home and family life in and around his natal town of Essaka. After his capture along with his sister in the yard of their familial compound while adults were laboring in the surrounding fields, Equiano was moved for months in a haphazard route toward the coast and exchanged at least six times to new speculators along the way. Equiano describes his horrid African journey as a progressive movement away from the familiar. "[T]hey stopped our mouths, tied

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[25] Vernon H. Nelson, "Archibald John Monteith: Native Helper and Assistant in the Jamaica Mission at New Carmel," *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society* 20 (1966): 29–52; and Kootz-Kretschmer, *Stories of Old Times*, pp. 7–8 (emphasis added).

[26] "The Life of Joseph Wright, A Native of Ackoo," Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Archive, Special Collections, Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies (London), West Africa Correspondence, Sierra Leone, 1839, Box 280, pp. 1–35, 18. Wright's narrative was printed by Philip Curtin in a much abridged and edited format that smoothed his prose and removed the many idiosyncrasies and infelicities of the original manuscript. Curtin, ed., *Africa Remembered*, pp. 317–333. I employ the original throughout this article.

our hands, and ran off with us into the nearest wood," he noted of his captors, "and continued to carry us as far as they could, till night came on. . . . The next morning we left the house, and continued travelling all the day. For a long time we had kept [to] the woods, but at last we came to a road which I believed I knew. I had now some hopes of being delivered." His hopes were crushed when his captors gagged him and rushed him and his sister out of the earshot of other travelers. The siblings were then parted. "The next day proved a day of greater sorrow than I had yet experienced; for my sister and I were then separated, while we lay clasped in each other's arms. It was in vain that we besought them not to part us: she was torn from me, and immediately carried away, while I was left in a state of distraction not to be described." In a twist of the cruel, stranger-than-fiction reality that emerges repeatedly in personal narrative, the two were later briefly reunited, and again divided. Similar traumatic stories of separation and serendipitous, though fleeting, encounter at a subsequent time are found in many narratives of enslavement.

"I had observed that my father's house was towards the rising of the sun," continued Equiano about his voyage of natal alienation. "I therefore determined to seize the first opportunity of making my escape, and to shape my course for that quarter; for I was quite oppressed and weighted down by grief after my mother and friends." Equiano was being held by a woman who was not attentive to his movements. "This liberty I used in embracing every opportunity to inquire the way to my own home," he writes. Equiano never made it home, but his homesickness while still so near to Iboland was an emotional expression of his palpable feelings of natal alienation.[27]

For Joseph Wright, natal alienation commenced even before movement when in 1825 enemies destroyed his town around him. Wright's dramatic narrative is a complex metaphor of consumption—Wright himself employed this last word to depict the siege—describing the

[27] All quotations attributed to Equiano in this paragraph and below are from Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin, 1995), pp. 31–61. Vincent Carretta has recently written that Equiano was probably not born in Africa but in North Carolina. If this is the case, Vassa likely constructed his account of capture from the experiences of others. Therefore, *pace* those who find in Vassa's probable fiction a reason simply to reject his narrative, I find it appropriate to employ the life history with the understanding that it may have been fashioned secondhand upon the testimony and experiences of those who had been enslaved in Africa during their lifetimes. In any case, what Equiano's narrative demonstrates is that even first-generation American creoles could identify specific parts of Africa as homelands (in this case Iboland), not the entire continent. See Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-made Man* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), pp. 8–9, 319–321.

town encircled by enemy fighters, people being crushed to death as they attempted escape but instead fell over the settlement's defensive walls to the unforgiving ground below, individuals committing suicide or being killed by enemies when they realized they could not escape, and the rest, including himself, timidly emerging from hiding to face their grim fates. "When the morning come," he wrote in his new language of English about a decade later, "I and my brethren took walk about in the town to see what the people doing. We found the city in sorrowful silence, for many hath fled and many of the ageable man have put an end to their lives." Wright was quickly snatched up as he aimlessly wandered the quiet streets. As he was led through the town's gates by the enemy who claimed him, he espied those who had besieged his town exhuming bodies of deceased townspeople to remove their rich burial textiles and men being executed along the road. Social death did not always require natal alienation.[28]

If place and kinship were more restricted in their geographical scope, language marked out wider social boundaries of familiarity and belonging. Captives seldom discussed African differences with respect to ethnicity as scholars readily do today; terms of belonging were usually linked to forms of speech and social practice that marked out "nations" and "countries," suggesting that modern interpretations of the importance of inter-*ethnic* violence in the slave trade are anachronistic and misleading. Ofodobendo Wooma "came from one nation to another, the language of which I did not understand" when he was enslaved for accidentally crushing the pipe of the creditor who held him as a pawn. Referring primarily to shifts in dialect, Crowther found himself a "perfect stranger" in the "Pohpoh country" of the coastal Bight of Benin, "having left the Eyo [Oyo] country" and its familiar speech forms "far behind." And consider again Equiano's words: "Although I was a great many days journey from my father's house, yet these people spoke exactly the same language with us," he remarks of his first month of captivity. He notes in his narrative each of his passages into different speech communities, later concluding: "From the time I left my own nation I always found somebody that understood me till I came to the sea coast. The languages of different nations did not totally differ, nor were they so copious as those of the Europeans, particularly the English. They were therefore easily learned; and, while I was journeying thus through Africa, I acquired two or three different tongues." Yet encounters with those who spoke captives' languages along the poly-

[28] "Life of Joseph Wright," quotation from p. 7.

glot routes of the African slave trade were welcomed and emphasized in narratives, suggesting the depth of feeling about displacement. Telling of his arrival at a coastal barracoon, Joseph Wright noted, "When we enter[ed] into the slaves fold the slaves shouted for joy for having seen another of their country man in the fold."[29]

Language was closely linked to social practices in Equiano's story about boundaries and displacement. "All the nations and people I had hitherto passed through resembled our own in their manners, customs, and language," Equiano noted, "but I came at length to a country, the inhabitants of which differed from us in all those particulars. I was very much struck with this difference, especially when I came among a people who did not circumcise, and eat without washing their hands. They cooked also in iron pots, and had European cutlasses and cross bows, which were unknown to us, and fought with their fists among themselves. . . . They wanted sometimes to ornament me in the same manner, but I would not suffer them; hoping that I might some time be among a people who did not thus disfigure themselves, as I thought they did." For Equiano, familiarity and strangeness, home and abroad, were encoded in multiple ways, including physical distance, alienation from kin, language, grooming practices, scarification, genital cutting, and the washing—or not—of hands.

Returns

African captives not only imagined specific homes within Africa, as Equiano and others did, but they often tried to return there. When he and his companions bathing in a river were set upon by assailants who wanted to capture them, Boyrereau Brinch wrote that "home invited so urgently, that nature began to do her duty, we flew to the wood with precipitation." Brinch did not escape. He crossed the Atlantic, serving bondage in Barbados, Cuba, and North America. Listen to Dogo of Damagaram (now Zinder, in modern south-central Niger) who was enslaved in about 1890 when a raiding party descended on him and his fellow travelers in the road. "I was born in the town of Damagaram. The name of my father was Mahama, that of my mother was Madena. When I was a boy I worked in the farm, together with my father. I had one brother who was lost in the war with the Sheik of Kukawa.

[29] Daniel B. Thorp, "Chattel with a Soul: The Autobiography of a Moravian Slave," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 112, no. 3 (1988): 433–451; Crowther, "Narratives of Three Liberated Negroes," p. 219; and "Life of Joseph Wright," p. 20.

When I was grown up I went to trade, together with a certain broker whose name was Mazakkara, of the town of Gumel. We took up *kanwa,* putting it on cows. Gumel is at a distance of a journey of fifteen days from our town. We went to and fro in this way for two years." After placing himself by reference to geography, kinship, and occupation, Dogo recounts his capture. His narrative, like many others, is short. Dogo measures his alienation from home primarily in the stages of his enslavement.

> When they had brought us to the town of Kano I was sold there; it was a native of Yoruba, who had gone to Kano, who bought me. He took me to Illosi, from Illosi to Badagri, near to the mouth of the sea. The person's name who bought me at Badagri was Akamgba of Domingo; he was a native of Zarifura. I was for six years in his house. I was employed in the palm-oil trade; I was mending casks to carry palm-oil to the mouth of the water. I and two of my friends, whose names were Zoki and Talifu, conspired together to run away. We came to Lagos, the place of Governor Glover; we formed a party of forty-four persons. We told Governor Glover that we wished to return to our own homes.

Dogo did not return home, although many of his fellow escapees from slavery did. While at Lagos awaiting documents from the British governor-general specifying his free status so he could travel home in legal safety, Dogo fell in with Christian missionaries at Lokodjah and decided to remain there instead. "But I myself did not want to go to our country," he explained later, "I remained at Lokojah with the Christian people. And of some who went, I heard the news that they arrived safe in their own home."[30]

Aspirations of return to kin and home ran especially deep among captives in Africa, for many were sought out by family members or knew the way home and never lost hope of effecting their escape. Such was the case with Dada Masiti, born early in the nineteenth century into the Al-Ahdal clan of the Asharaf in Brava, a city on the Somali coast. She was kidnapped at about age six and taken to Zanzibar. She was rescued by family members a full ten years later and returned home to Brava to devote herself to religious studies and mysticism. There, she became a prolific and well-known poet. In the highlands of Madagascar, a Betsileo boy whose name is not given in the record was kidnapped

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[30] Benjamin F. Prentiss, *The Blind African Slave, or, Memoirs of Boyrereau Brinch, Nicknamed Jeffrey Brace* (St. Albans, Vt.: Printed by Harry Whitney, 1810), p. 71; and *Hausa Tales Told by Dorugu and Others* (London: Sheldon Press, 1932), pp. 16–17.

early in the nineteenth century and taken to Antananarivo, the capital of a powerful military kingdom.

> The lad happened to be the son of people in easy circumstances who were much afflicted at the loss of their child and beside sending their servants [probably slaves] around the Country in search of him, they fed augurs to divine his situation. All their endeavours, however assiduous, proved futile, and having mourned the loss of their only son for nearly three months, the father proceeded to the Capital attendant on his Chieftain to be present at the Kings return from his campaign and to do homage. At that period the father happened to meet with his child, who hearing of the arrival of some people from his native place had absconded from his new master to endeavor to fall in with them and had luckily met his father.

The boy was eventually freed to return home with his father.[31]

Take also the story of Aaron Kuku and his father. Aaron was born in the town of Petewu in Eweland (now southern Togo) in about 1860. He was enslaved in 1869, when about nine years old, during an Ashante military campaign in Eweland. He and his entire family fled Petewu at the approach of the Ashante army, but all were eventually snatched in the surrounding countryside by different enemy warriors, who led them away separately. Although taken individually, they were reunited briefly in Kpakpa before being separated again. After some time and several transfers, Kuku found himself in rural Ashante to the south of Kumasi. He attempted suicide after learning, erroneously, that his father had been among the large number of male prisoners publicly executed in Kumasi. The news dashed his hope. Fortunately he was unsuccessful in his attempt at self-destruction for, learning of his son's whereabouts, Aaron's father absconded from his master in Kumasi and found his way to the boy's village of captivity. Betrayed by the Ewe slave-wife of an Ashanti man in the town from whom he sought information about his son, Aaron's father was promptly detained. But in the dark of night and under casual watch, Kuku and his father plotted a successful escape together. After a harrowing escapade of more than a year in which they narrowly evaded recapture several times, they were successful in returning to Eweland.

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[31] Mohammed M. Kassim, "Islam and Swahili Culture on the Banadir Coast," *Northeast African Studies,* n.s., 2 (1995): 21–37; Roberta Ann Dunbar, "Muslim Women in African History," in *The History of Islam in Africa,* ed. Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Powuels (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 404; "Diary of James Hastie," 1 September 1822–23 April 1823, National Archives of Britain (London, Kew), CO/167, 66, entry for 6 March 1823, 30–32 (Betsileo boy).

Years later Aaron recounted what befell father and son at their arrival in the first village of what they considered their home country.

> When we told them that we had escaped from Ashanti they said, "Now you have come home! Now you have come home!" My father asked them the name of their village. They said, "Awatoe." This name my father did not know. He asked them if they knew Vakpo. "Yes, they are our kin." Then my father asked them if they would send a messenger to Vakpo in order that a messenger might go from there to our home to tell our relations of our arrival, so that they might fetch us.
>
> The people agreed, but said, "When fugitives come to us they must pay us something." My father replied that they must ask our relations, who would supply the money. We did not know that they deceived us and sent no messenger.
>
> For three weeks they cared for us until we were strong. Meanwhile they were making plans to sell us. One day they told us that the people from Vakpo had come, but this was not the truth, and they sold us as slaves. We were taken to Anfoe-Bume, and there I heard how we had been sold. I threw myself down and wept, but my father said, "Be quiet, we are nearly home. Soon we shall hear from our own people. At least we are no longer in Ashanti." The man who had bought us was friendly. He had once been in our village, and gave us news of our friends.
>
> For thirty-eight months we had been on our way from Ashanti, and now for *nine years* we were slaves in Eweland. Our master in Anfoe decided to sell my father secretly to a friend in Atsem. This friend wanted me too. This became known in the village, and made the people very angry, for they said if the Ewe people sent their countrymen back again as slaves to the Ashanti it would cause great misfortune. So the sale came to nothing.
>
> Meanwhile, our relations in Petewu heard of us, and complained to the people of Awatoe who had sold us to the people of Anfoe. This they did through one of the chiefs, and finally through the Europeans in Ada. This frightened the people. The price was given back to our master before the police came, and we were free at last, and *my father and I returned to our home after an absence of so many years*.

Father and son had been away from Petewu for nearly fifteen years. Once he had earned enough money, Aaron later redeemed his mother and partially reconstituted his precaptive family.[32]

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[32] Aaron Kuku, *The Life of Aaron Kuku of Eweland. Born 1860—Died 1929. Told by himself. Translated and abridged from the German version of Rev. P. Wiegräbe, and published by kind permission of the Verlag der Norddeutschen mission, Bremen* (London: Sheldon Press, 1931). Emphasis added only in the last paragraph of the quotation.

A typical case of enslavement and intense yearning for home that led father and son to risk their lives, Aaron's story reflects a theme common in African narratives of enslavement. Several slaves liberated by British naval cruisers suppressing the newly illegal slave trade from 1808 off the West African coast and freed at Sierra Leone (as "recaptives" or "liberated Africans") later returned to their communities of origin, if only for a short visit. Many years after their mutual enslavement and separation, for example, Bishop Crowther found his mother. James Macaulay, a recaptive member of the famed 1841 missionary expedition up the Niger River, was reunited with his sister and, later, with one of the women who had sold him into bondage. The Rev. James Frederick Schön of the expedition reported this last encounter with some detail in his journal.

> Our Interpreter, James Macaulay, had been a slave for some time at this town [Buddu], and he showed me the person who sold him to Rabba: she was a woman of respectable appearance. While we were standing at the landing-place, waiting till the boat was ready, the Interpreter brought her to me; saying, "Master, this is the woman who sold me. She wishes me to go home with her, to eat and drink; but I told her I had no time." While I was speaking to her about the slave-trade, she admitted that she had sold Macaulay; but at that time did not know it was wrong; and that her husband had more to do in it than herself. She asked me whether Macaulay could not wait a few hours longer, as she wished to make him a present of some fowls; and was evidently grieved that she had no opportunity of doing something for him.

"Scenes like these," Schön said rather flippantly of the tangled drama, "are always very interesting to me."[33]

African-born captives who did depart sub-Saharan Africa and later made their way back to their natal place and kin testify to a yearning common among slaves who found themselves in widely disparate destinations. Born in Kuka, Bornu, in about 1835, Mohammed Ali ben Said was captured with friends when about fifteen years old during a kidnapping raid in the countryside. He was marched across the Sahara through the Fezzan to Tripoli and later transported by boat to Alexandria (Egypt) and beyond. Experiencing a series of sales, he served in

[33] James Frederick Schön and Samuel Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther who, with the Sanction of Her Majesty's Government, Accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841 in Behalf of the Church Missionary Society* (London: Hatchard and Son, Nisbet and Co. & Seeleys, 1842), 204 (Macaulay), 210–211 (Crowther).

Constantinople (Istanbul) and St. Petersburg (Russia) before traveling extensively in Europe, where his servile status melted away and he expressed a fervent desire to return home. He parted from his Russian patron, Prince Nicholas Troubetzkoy, a godson of Czar Nicholas, in 1869, intending to head for Sierra Leone. For some unknown reason, he turned from that desire at the last minute and crossed the Atlantic to the United States, where he taught for a time in Detroit and eventually enlisted in a "colored regiment" of the Union forces. He never returned to Bornu.[34]

Even African slaves who crossed the Atlantic to the Americas were sometimes reunited with kin, as were the two young Robin Johns of Old Calabar, snatched by ruse aboard a British slaver in the Bight of Biafra in 1767. They served several years in Caribbean and North American bondage before travel to England, where they were freed in a dramatic court case before eventually regaining their native land and kin in 1774. Like others captured in their lifetimes, the Robin Johns were not content with a return to just anywhere in Africa. Home meant a specific place and the company of kin. Other notable eighteenth-century Atlantic cases with similar outcomes include the remarkable stories of William Ansah Sessarakoo, Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, and Abdul Rahman of Futa Jallon.[35]

Son of the "king of Cape Mesurado," Peter Panah narrowly escaped from Atlantic slavery in a chilling and revealing tale about the sometimes shockingly lax commitment of Atlantic abolitionists. He intended to return home but instead died in Surrey, England, in October 1790 at the age of about twenty. Take also the life of an unnamed black loyalist during the war for US independence, whose story of reunion was told by C. B. Wadström in 1795. (Black loyalists were slaves who had escaped their North American owners and joined British forces during the war for US independence. Many were evacuated to Nova Scotia by the British in 1793 and later sent to colonize Sierra Leone.)

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[34] "Native of Bornoo," pp. 485–495; and Said, *Autobiography of Nicholas Said*.

[35] Sparks, *Two Princes of Calabar;* Thomas Bluett, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon, the High Priest of Boonda in Africa* (London: Richard Ford, 1734); Frances Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa, with a Particular Account of Job Ben Solomon, Who Was in England in the Year 1733, and Known by the Name of the African* (London: E. Cave, 1738); *The Royal African, or, Memoirs of the Young Prince of Annamaboe Comprehending a Distinct Account of His Country and Family, His Condition while a Slave in Barbadoes, His Voyage from Thence, and Reception here in England* (London: Printed for W. Reeve, G. Woodfall & J. Barnes, 1749); and Terry Alford, *Prince Among Slaves: The True Story of an African Prince Sold into Slavery in the American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

> It hath been observed, that some of the blacks from N. Scotia were originally Africans, and that many of these were, as they say, kidnapped when young. It hath been found that three were almost from the vicinity of S. Leona; one of them from S. Leona itself, as he used to mention at sea. When landed, he found himself nearly on the spot whence he had been carried off, and where, he says, a woman seized him and sold him to an American slaveship, about 15 years before. He recollected the way to his native town, which was only two or three miles off; but, for a time, he dreaded the parting from his companions, to visit it. Not long after, standing with them among the tents, a part of natives paid them a visit of curiosity. An elderly native woman seemed much affected at the sight of this N. Scotian, and spoke to her companions with much agitation. At length she ran up to him and embraced him: she proved to be his own mother. His father was now dead: the parents had never discovered any trace of their child. The female thief remains unknown, and the impunity of the captain, even if discovered, is but too obvious: nor is it probable that, if the kidnapper had been known by the boy kidnapped, his redemption and the punishment of the criminal would have followed. Having once committed her prey to the hold of a slave-ship, discovery seems to have been impossible.

Africans such as this unnamed black loyalist who had seen servitude, war, and much betrayal in both Africa and North America retained a memory of African home that was specific to place and people.[36]

In West Africa after the turn of the century, the progressive abolition of slavery fostered conditions in which hundreds of thousands of enslaved persons fled toward their kin and homelands, or for new situations. In what Martin Klein terms the Great Exodus, more than a million slaves in French West Africa fled their masters between 1905 and 1913. Judging by reports from colonial administrators, many of these individuals were first-generation captives seeking to return home. The memory of capture and such flights of return was still vivid among the descendants of slaves in rural Niger when in 1971 Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan and his research team interviewed Boubakar Boureyma and five other Songhay speakers in Sassalé, near the Niger River, about the history of slavery in the area. Within the Sokoto caliphate of what is now Northern Nigeria, about 200,000 slaves, or some 10 percent of the total held there, fled their masters upon British conquest between

[36] C. B. Wadström, *An Essay on Colonization, Particularly Applied to the Western Coast of Africa, with some Free Thoughts on Cultivation and Commerce; also Brief Descriptions of the Colonies already Formed, or Attempted, in Africa, including those of Sierra Leona and Bulama*, 2 vols. (London: Barton and Harvey, 1795), pp. ii, 784–787 (Panah), 78 (loyalist).

1897 and 1907. Most of these escapees were recent captives. Fugitive slaves also filled the East African coast in the last decades of the nineteenth century, forming new settlements and villages and in some cases attempting to return home. Although their number has not been estimated, East African runaways precipitated a labor and financial crisis among their masters. Many enslaved Africans not only sought better lives for themselves through flight, but they attempted to return to the natal homes they longed for while in bondage. Failing that, they created new situations for themselves away from their masters. Unfortunately, we know little about the lives of return that at least hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of them achieved.[37]

Listening to Captives: The Diaspora in Africa

Imagining a home and yearning for it, as most of the captives whose stories are explored here did, lends emotional content and meaning to involuntary experiences of dislocation, of being in exile. And exile, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* reminds us, is "the state or a period of forced absence from one's country or home." This is significant, for the extant literature on the global African diaspora with its focus primarily on the Americas, as I have argued, traditionally defines Africans as in diaspora, in exile, only when they departed sub-Saharan Africa. George Shepperson, the first to employ the term "African diaspora" in print (1968), commenced this line of reasoning; most scholars of the African diaspora up to the present have followed it. Shepperson's foundational article was titled "The African Abroad or the African Diaspora." By abroad, diaspora, Shepperson meant *outside* sub-Saharan Africa. This restricted and flawed definition rests not on the contemporary testimony of captives but on the later-developing premise of "Africa" as a "country or home" for all persons born on the continent. The vague idea of continental Africa as home emerged among creoles in the Americas, not among first-generation captives in Africa. This American creole vision originating from one branch of the African diaspora has been inappropriately adopted by scholars of the diaspora

[37] Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, pp. 170–173, 197; Lovejoy, *Transformations*, pp. 252–275; Sardan, *Quand nos pères étaient captifs*, esp. pp. 138–152; Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery*, pp. 31–63; Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters*, pp. 48–51; and Fred Morton, *Children of Ham: Freed Slaves and Fugitive Slaves on the Kenya Coast, 1873 to 1907* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990).

as a whole. It is the basis on which Africans in dispersion south of the Sahara have been removed conceptually from the African diaspora.[38]

The notion of all "Africa" as a home was mostly foreign to continental Africans in the age of enslavement, of course. It is an anachronism that scholars studying capture on the continent must shed in favor of concepts of home emerging from the consciousness and actions of the captured. "To think about Africa as a place, we must think historically," write historians John Parker and Richard Rathbone in an illuminating essay on the idea of Africa as it developed over time. And to think historically about Africa as a place, scholars of capture must listen to what prisoners said and what they experienced. The nineteenth- and twentieth-century American *ideal* of continental Africa as home—as powerful and poignant as it is in testifying to both the loss of memory about specific origins and the restoration of identity in the most trying of circumstances—is not a useful analytical tool for scholars. We must return to primary sources and to the experiences of the captured to define the scope, boundaries, and diversity of the African diaspora.[39]

Even those first-generation captives who found themselves in American bondage and wrote about or dictated personal experiences of capture in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, as I have shown, did not interpret "Africa" as a home. That idea emerged

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[38] Entry for noun "exile" in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary,* online version at http://www.m-w.com/; and George Shepperson, "The African Abroad or the African Diaspora," in *Emerging Themes of African History,* ed. Terence O. Ranger (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), pp. 152–176.

[39] John Parker and Richard Rathbone, *African History: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 4. An emerging literature on African ethnicities in the Americas is now breaking away from the paradigm of "Africa as home," but this work is about the lives of first-generation captives in the Americas (not the creoles who envisioned all of Africa as home) and does not challenge notions of the African diaspora as lying only beyond sub-Saharan Africa. None of the scholars of African ethnicities in the Americas has argued that we conceptualize enslaved Africans south of the Sahara as part of the African diaspora. For examples of this literature see Robin Law, "Ethnicity and the Slave Trade: 'Lucumi' and 'Nago' as Ethnonyms in West Africa," *History in Africa* 24 (1997); Philip A. Howard, *Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John Thornton, "La Nation angolaise en Amérique, son identité en Afrique et en Amérique," *Cahiers des Anneaux de la Mémoire* 2 (2000): 241–256; Linda M. Heywood, ed., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Robin Law, "Ethnicities of Enslaved Africans in the Diaspora: On the Meanings of 'Mina' (Again)," *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 247–267; and J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

among their children and children's children. Places of belonging, as captives so vividly describe in their narratives of enslavement, were marked out in lesser scale and in the more precise and personal terms of language, geography, residence, polity, kinship, and cultural practice. When taken up uncritically by modern scholars as an analytical tool, the idea of continental Africa as an original home effaces from the African diaspora the natal alienation, the horrid journeying, and the broken lives of servitude experienced by tens of millions of captives within sub-Saharan Africa, removing Africa itself from the geography of the African diaspora and transforming the continent merely into a source of slaves, not a destination. This effacement has disabled scholarship on the global African diaspora, raising the Americas as paragons of Africa in dispersion and as the centers from which theory about the diaspora is spun.[40]

The problem, of course, is as much the vantage point from which scholars espy the global dispersions of Africans as it is their definition of them, for the vast outpouring of scholarship on the African diaspora has been produced largely in North American and European universities and has taken the experiences of Africans and their descendants in those areas as its points of departure. With the expansion of knowledge about African slavery and the volume and methods of the African slave trades both within and outside of sub-Saharan Africa since the time Shepperson penned his foundational essay, it is no longer possible to think of the African dispersions of the western Atlantic as constituting either the demographic center of the African diaspora or as providing its core models of cultural adaptation, self-consciousness, and community formation. The African diaspora as concept must be expanded, geographically recentered, and reworked to reflect the experiences of all Africans in dispersion from their homes, or it will remain a parochial tool. Making room in the African diaspora for the diverse experiences of Africa's forced migrants conscious of their displacement and yearning for specific homes will require scholars to think and work in new and fresh ways, to employ new data, to expand beyond familiar American locations and languages, and to adopt an explicitly global-comparative approach that does not eliminate Africa from the African diaspora. This will require transforming many current assumptions about the demography and consciousness of African communities in dispersion to appreciate how Mississippi, Martinique, Senegal, Tunisia, Hausaland, southern Somalia, the Swahili coast, the Hijaz, Oman,

[40] On this point see also Larson, "African Diasporas and the Atlantic," pp. 129–147.

Baluchistan, Gujarat, and the Mascarene islands each provide unique examples of African communities and self-conceptions abroad.

While future advances in knowledge of Africa's diasporas will undoubtedly continue to be grounded in the study of particular people, places, and times, expanding the boundaries of understanding will require a more consistent resort to comparative thinking. Historians of the African diaspora in its diverse branches need one another to rejuvenate and advance both their research designs and their guiding perspectives. In this article, for example, I have benefited from the rich and fertile literatures on North American slave narratives, employing them to think critically about African narratives of enslavement. In turn, definition and examination of Africa-centered biographies has enabled me to "provincialize" the North American slave narrative and set it within a broader field of diasporan experience. Taking African narratives of enslavement rather than the more narrow but broadly known North American slave narratives as my center of gravity has enabled me to bring the process of capture and natal alienation within Africa much more clearly into focus, belying the notion that anywhere in sub-Saharan Africa was "country or home" for new captives. To this experience, narratives of enslavement produced in widely divergent times and contexts universally and amply testify. Keeping the African diaspora firmly centered on its demographic heartland—Africa south of the Sahara—will enable historians to peer out at its many branches and overlapping dispersions with a comparative eye and to appreciate the diversity of its forms without mistaking a province of that diaspora for its whole.